

Washington, DC - Saying that government must do everything it can to help find cures and treatments for all diseases and disorders, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today voted to significantly expand federal funding for life-saving stem cell research. The House approved the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act by a margin of 253-174.

"This bill paves the way for unprecedented research that could lead to cures and treatments for more than 100 million Americans who suffer from cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, spinal cord injuries, and other debilitating diseases and disorders," Hinchey said. "In my opinion, it is immoral to deny stem cell research when it holds the promise of saving so many lives and relieving the pain that diseases and disorders bring to far too many people. It would be an absolute tragedy if the president vetoes this measure because the stem cell lines in question are going to be discarded by the clinics holding them if they are not used for research."

The bipartisan stem cell research bill would increase the number of embryonic stem cell lines that would be eligible to be used in federally-funded research. The bill only authorizes federal research funds for stem cell lines generated from embryos that would otherwise be discarded by fertility clinics. Specifically, the bill would authorize the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to support research involving embryonic stem cells meeting certain criteria, regardless of the date on which the stem cells were derived from an embryo. Current policy limits the use of federal funds for research only to those stem cell lines that existed when President Bush issued an executive order on August 9, 2001. Only 21 of the 78 stem cell lines that were available at the time of Bush's executive order are still available for researchers and some of those may not even be usable anymore.

The bipartisan stem cell bill, which Hinchey cosponsored, includes strict ethical guidelines, which do not exist under the administration's current policy. Specifically, the bill allows federal funding of embryonic stem cell research only if the following requirements have been met: 1) Embryos used to derive stem cells were originally created for fertility treatment purposes and are in excess of fertility treatment needs; 2) The individuals seeking fertility treatments for whom the embryos were created have determined that the embryos "would never be implanted in a woman and would otherwise be discarded;" and 3) The individuals seeking fertility treatments must have "donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation."

"The world is on the verge of unlocking a series of major cures and treatments for very serious illnesses and diseases and the United States has the opportunity to be a leader in the scientific

research that will get us there," Hinchey said. "Passing this measure and allowing greater stem cell research will enable the United States to play a leading role in the medical revolution we are about to experience."

The stem cell bill that passed the House today was also approved in the last session of Congress, but President Bush vetoed it. The bill now moves to the Senate where it is expected to pass. It is unclear if President Bush will again issue a veto on this bill.